

A QUEER PET.

BY E. H. BARBOUR.

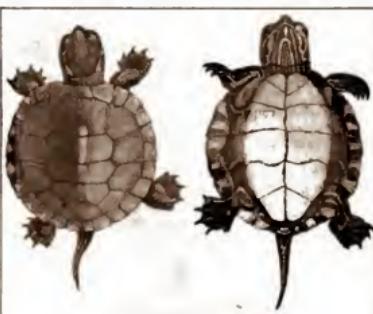
THE prettiest little "monster" that I have ever seen was a young two-headed painted tortoise (*Chrysemys picta*), caught last June by Master Leighton Foster, while hunting for Natural History specimens in the marshes bordering West River, in New Haven, Connecticut.

This pretty little pet, the shell of which was quite normal save that it was a little broader than long, had the usual four legs and a tail, but was furnished with two perfectly formed heads and necks, which acted independently of one another—so independently, in fact, that the right and left heads fought like little Trojans, whenever there was occasion for jealousy or spite.

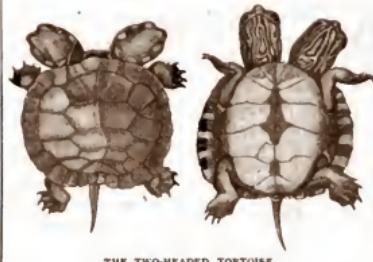
Now, the tortoise is generally thought a dull and stupid creature, but this little fellow knew the hand that fed him and refused to eat anything, however tempting, from strangers. The favorite morsel of these twin heads was a cricket or grasshopper. But the head lucky enough to seize it first, found its right to sole possession stoutly contested by the other. Since they were equals in age and strength, and had fair and equal advantages in every way, these spirited little tugs-of-war ended only when the morsel separated. Then each, thinking itself the hero, gulped its portion with great satisfaction. They seemed healthy and ate with evident relish, and consumed equal amounts; but often their appetites were not the same, for at feeding-time the greed of one and abstinence of the other showed they were not equally hungry. Repeatedly I have seen one little head turn slyly around and snap at the bright eye of the other, plainly mistaking it for something to eat, and causing that head to withdraw hastily into the shell. And thereby there is suggested a point of continual discussion between these two heads which I fear was never settled amicably. For it often happened that both heads were inclined to withdraw into their common shell or house at the same time, which they could do, it is true; but when both were in it was plainly very crowded.

Now, if there is any one privilege peculiarly that of the tortoise, it is the privilege of withdrawing at its own sweet will into its own private shell, without any considerations for outsiders. Certainly, it would be a very lax and easy-going tortoise that would yield its long-established right to seclusion,

and submit peaceably to the encroachment of another; so these heads quarreled daily. Sometimes one head wished to look around, and then the other enjoyed the luxury of the shell in peace, but in course of time the twin was sure to withdraw, too. Then the two heads would fidget irritably; only for a brief moment, however, for they came out almost at once, as indignant and angry as their tender years would allow, and, closing their eyes, beat their heads together and fought with all their



THE COMMON TORTOISE.



THE TWO-HEADED TORTOISE.

might, till some compromise was effected. These were the most amusing and absurd little scrimmages imaginable. Just think of one *itself* engaged in deadly combat with another *itself*; what an absurdity!—but so it was. And neither one could go away to leave the other and sulk and pout

about it, so they generally gave up when tired out and wisely agreed to disagree.

When sleep overcame one head, it withdrew, together with its two feet, into the shell. But the companion head, wide-awake and looking about in all directions, might simultaneously decide to be up and doing, and then it would start off vigorously with the two feet belonging to its side of the house ; but its efforts were vain : it only went round and round in a circle, the sleeping side acting as a dead-weight. It did n't seem to mind it much, however, but continued on its journey uninterruptedly till the sleeper awoke, whereupon the two sides started off in unison, but with the most awkward gait possible. For, instead of putting a fore foot forward, like the normal tortoise, following immediately with a diagonally opposite hind foot, this little monster stepped out with its front feet at once, so that its fore parts were left without support, and dropped ; then the hind feet stepped forward, leaving the hind parts without support, and they dropped in turn ; and thus, bobbing up and down, it advanced by an awkward, rocking gait.

But the sleeper, roused abruptly, was not always disposed to start off at once with its companion, so the other scurried around as best it could till convinced that a circle is endless, and that it must have recourse to other expedients than those provided by nature. Out of its necessity, surprising as it may appear, this little monster had invented a way of getting about. Extending its two feet, it clutched at grass and weeds, and so dragged itself sideways, and went when it would, or where it chose, whether the other side slept, or, being awake, took its ease, refusing to budge. I have seen them walk thus, repeatedly ; but it was the invention of the right head, and the left never resorted to it so far as I could observe. Thus it will be seen that there was no concerted action between the right side and the left, and yet they started together, with surprising frequency, to do precisely the same things : to eat, to swim, or to walk.

A smooth concrete walk was a favorite place for giving this pet an occasional sun-bath. When placed on this, or on a smooth piece of ground, it went through some queer antics before starting. First, the left head turned to the left, the right to the right, after gazing vacantly about for a time, they at length started off with a will in these two opposite directions at once. The result is, of course, that opposing one another as they did, they went backward, sometimes two or three feet, before they found how useless were their efforts to go each his own way. But when they ascertained this, they stopped short, and, after a moment's rest, started off together, teetering up and down, but traveling straight along till a stalk of grass or a weed was

encountered. This was sure to bring them to a standstill, for one insisted upon turning to the left of it, the other to the right, which brought them astride the weed, where they stood, tugging away obstinately till strength failed them.

A ledge along the concrete walk, not over three-quarters of an inch high, easily scaled by other pet tortoises of the same age, proved an insurmountable barrier for a long time. But, finally, the two-headed tortoise, with its two wills and two walking systems, learned to stand up on tiptoe by the ledge, and, giving a sudden kick, to throw itself over, but so violently at first that it invariably landed on its back, a most unfortunate predicament in its case, from which, unlike the normal tortoise, it could not extricate itself without help. But it soon learned to clear the ledge and alight right side up on the other side.

Every one who saw these queer maneuvers and the intelligence displayed in the adapting of means to ends for which it was so poorly fitted by nature, was charmed with the little pet.

In the water of its aquarium it paddled about slowly, sometimes diving to the bottom, at other times resting on the surface, with one head, perhaps, under the water, the other above ; showing that the heads breathed independently, a fact easily verified by watching the two throats as they expanded and contracted. At the same time, it was noticed that the two heads opened their mouths and gaped occasionally, as if to breathe more air. This was the only sign of weakness. It may seem strange that any two so completely one should have differed in temperament, for they were certainly brought up under identically the same treatment ; yet the right head, on many occasions, was the more irritable and timid,—ready to pick a quarrel with its other self, or to dodge at a fly or strange animal, while the other head seemed stolid and self-confident at all times.

But I had not reached this point in its simple history, nor had I satisfied my desire to study all its ways, when the little prize met with a serious accident. Its aquarium was carefully provided with clean, fresh water and a liberal supply of water plants. Now, while they were renewing the water and supplies, one day, this little curiosity was put out on the smooth grass almost within easy reach. Suddenly there was a rush and spring, and before even the most watchful could interfere, a prowling, stray cat had pounced upon the favorite inmate of the aquarium. Of course it was rescued at once, but it was thought that the ruthless cat had killed the pet outright. To their great satisfaction, it seemed to be unhurt. There was no trace of blood, not even a scratch visible.

The right head ventured at once to peer out

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cautiously, but the left was too frightened to leave its protecting shell for fully half an hour. But finding itself in familiar hands the pet was soon itself again, and was restored to its aquarium.

The next morning it walked, swam, and ate as it was wont to do, although the left head was not hungry, and refused to eat at all, which was not uncommon. The next day, also, the left head ate nothing, and on the third it drooped. It was evidently very weak and sick, yet courageous and bound to hold out as long as possible, for, when petted, it straightened up resolutely and tried to make off with its companion, as it had done for so many weeks, to the wonder and delight of all who saw it. But in less than an hour it was dead, and the left legs also; leaving its companion apparently in great distress, for it was exceedingly uneasy. Undoubtedly the living head had some intimation of its approaching end and restlessly walked

about as if to escape. But in two hours and a half the right head was dead also. The cat's claw had pierced the neck of the left head. Careful examination showed, close to the shell, a small but fatal wound in the neck. But for this tragic end, it might have lived on through the winter, or possibly even longer.

During its short life, from the 1st of June to the middle of September, many people from many cities visited it, and enjoyed its queer pranks, its quarrels for more room, its tugs-of-war for food, its many misunderstandings of itself, its awkward gait and wise look.

Large sums of money were offered for it, but this rare pet had so endeared itself to its owners that they were not tempted to part company with it. Now that it is dead, they keep the body carefully preserved, and feel that its memory deserves to be perpetuated.

